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ABSTRACT

This document, which highlights the efforts of the National Institute for Literacy to pilot the development of state literacy accountability systems in four states, outlines the components, operation, and importance of state accountability systems and discusses considerations in developing a systems approach to planning and implementing a quality accountability system. First, the institute's mission is explained. Next, four specific areas within state literacy systems in which literacy accountability systems build capacity are examined along with potential impacts of state literacy accountability systems. Discussed next is the role of state literacy accountability systems in measuring program results and demonstrating that literacy works for selected groups of individuals. Ten steps to establishing a state literacy accountability system are listed, and demonstration programs in Hawaii, Kentucky, New York, and Tennessee are profiled. Each profile includes the following: discussion of program's vision, list of program highlights to date, and contact person. Lessons learned from the demonstrations are summarized, and steps in moving forward from "patchwork quilt" accountability efforts to high quality accountability systems are outlined. (MN)

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Literacy Works

Building State Performance Measurement, Reporting, and Improvement Systems

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NATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR LITERACY
June 1995

"By the year 2000, every adult American will be literate and possess the knowledge and skills necessary to compete in a global economy and exercise the rights and responsibilities of citizenship."

Goal Six, National Education Goals

"Literacy is the ability to read something and get the information you need and then be able to act on it."

Adult Learner

Literacy Works

Building State Performance Measurement, Reporting, and Improvement Systems

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NATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR LITERACY

Dear Friends and Colleagues,

Twenty million adult Americans lack the basic literacy skills necessary to be productive workers, full partners in their children's education, and citizens involved in building strong communities. How can we effectively address this problem? We have to start by asking the right questions:

- How can we best invest in adult literacy? What changes must we make in our adult literacy systems to reduce welfare dependence, break the cycle of poverty, develop and maintain a quality workforce, assure that children are ready to learn, and enable all adults to develop the knowledge and skills necessary to participate as active citizens?
- How can we assure appropriate returns on our investments in literacy?

These are the key policy and practice questions behind the work of the National Institute for Literacy (NIFL). This publication highlights one of our most ambitious responses to date.

Building Capacity by Building Systems. The National Institute for Literacy is piloting the creation of state literacy accountability systems in four states—Hawai'i, Kentucky, New York, and Tennessee. These states are designing and implementing performance measurement, reporting, and improvement systems to define the outcomes they seek to achieve, monitor results, and make continuous improvements in literacy-related programs and policies.

Assuring Returns on Literacy Investments. Accountability systems enable states to unify goals, consolidate programs, develop common terminology and compatible technologies, and obtain information essential for more effective decision-making. Even more important, effective literacy systems have far-reaching implications for both economic development and education reform.

Documenting that Literacy Works. At the mid-point in this five-year demonstration, the achievements are noteworthy and extremely promising for the future. If this performance trajectory continues, in the midst of debates about where and how to direct scarce public resources, we should be able to document that our literacy investments are well-placed, and that, indeed, literacy works.

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INTRODUCTION

The National Institute for Literacy (NIFL) is an independent federal agency charged with enhancing the national effort to reach the sixth National Education Goal—that all adult Americans will be literate by the year 2000. Created under the National Literacy Act of 1991, NIFL has a broad and ambitious mission to:

- Provide national leadership in the development of policies and programs that support the creation of a highly effective and efficient literacy system;
- Create an agenda for research, development and evaluation in the area of adult and family basic skills education;
- Improve the overall quality of literacy services in the nation to maximize progress towards 100% literacy in America;
- Implement an effective communication system that can reach the state, local and national levels with timely policy and program information.

Working to Build Capacity and Quality of Services. As the only federal entity administered jointly by the Secretaries of Education, Labor, and Health and Human Services, NIFL is the hub of a national network for literacy, working to build capacity and quality of services. One of the Institute's key capacity building initiatives is the development and piloting of a Performance Measurement, Reporting, and Improvement System in four states. What are these state accountability systems, how do they work, and why are they important?

WHAT IS A STATE ACCOUNTABILITY SYSTEM?

A Flexible Framework for Systemic Reform. A statewide accountability system is a mechanism for focusing on the results of investments in literacy and improving our return on those investments. It is a powerful tool for systemic change—a guide for states just beginning the change process and a reinforcement for those states already on the way. It builds capacity in four specific areas within state literacy systems:

1. A literacy accountability system focuses efforts to achieve national and state goals. A statewide literacy system that aims to enable adults to lead more productive lives must be aligned with larger state and federal human resource and economic development goals. Developing a statewide accountability system to measure progress toward these goals requires interagency cooperation, program collaboration, coordinated service delivery strategies, and the integrated effort of all stakeholders in the system.

2. It measures progress by measuring results, not process. Federal and state reporting systems have focused in the past on inputs such as the number of clients/students enrolled or the number of hours they attended classes. Such measures tell us little about the real value of

the program. A state accountability system guides a state towards defining what it wants to achieve—real changes in people's lives.

3. An accountability system that links literacy to broader state goals puts in place a management information system that enables agencies to streamline reporting and share information. A state accountability system provides a mechanism for agreement on common definitions and elements, and encourages the use of compatible electronic databases to centralize information for easy access and updating. Centralized information about programs makes possible one-stop program shopping. Centralized participant files allow students to relocate without losing their records.

4. It ensures the continuous improvement of programs towards 100% results. A state literacy accountability system provides information to program managers about how well their programs work and to state policymakers about the effectiveness of their policies. Able to identify the strengths and weaknesses within their system, states can build on programs and strategies that work, discontinue those that don't, and isolate problems that need alternative strategies, not additional resources.

The following chart illustrates the potential impacts of a state literacy accountability system:

"WHAT'S IN"	"WHAT'S OUT"
Program Collaboration and Resource Coordination	Categorical, Fragmented Programs
Measuring Results or Impacts	Measuring Inputs
Matching Services to Clients' Needs	Matching People to Slots
Continuous Improvement	Repeating without Rethinking
Agreement on Terms	Special Terms for each Program
Providing Accountability	Reporting Expenditures
Centralized Database	Separate, Uncoordinated Files
Compatible, State-of-the-Art Technologies	Incompatible, Outdated Technologies
Programs Linked to State & National Goals	Programs Satisfy Individual Funding Criteria
One-Stop Concept, Multiple Access Points	Multiple Sources of Information
Integrated Service Delivery	Lack of Coordination Among Service Providers
Focus on Commonalties	Focus on Differences

WHY IS A STATE ACCOUNTABILITY SYSTEM IMPORTANT?

For Measuring Results

A state accountability system helps states know how they are doing in . . .

- Moving toward national and state goals for literacy and lifelong learning
- Building knowledge and skills for adults to compete in a global economy
- Building knowledge and skills to exercise the rights and responsibilities of citizenship
- Building knowledge and skills to assure that parents are participants in their children's education

To Demonstrate that Literacy Works For . . .

Adult Learners, who become active participants in their learning process. They gain easier access to the system, learn up front about program alternatives, define their own goals, and choose the programs to meet those goals.

- **As Parents:** They set a good example; help children with moral, social, and intellectual development; become independent of financial aid.
- **As Workers:** They get, keep and upgrade jobs; become more flexible workers; teach and learn from others in the workplace; and contribute to the productivity of the organization, the community, the state, and the nation.
- **As Citizens:** They become informed citizens; participate in the political process; contribute to the community's development; gain citizenship; and vote.

Service Providers, who know what performance is expected, are able to track progress toward goals, and gain greater accountability for results. Streamlined reporting requirements mean they spend less time on paperwork and more on client needs.

State Agencies, who can share resources and information with other state agencies to consolidate and streamline existing programs. This information is necessary to evaluate and improve programs by identifying barriers and providing incentives for more effective policy and program development.

State and Federal Legislators, who are able to link literacy outcomes to broader state and national policies, and gain a better understanding of the value of investment in literacy.

All Citizens, who see their tax dollars producing efficient and effective literacy programs that yield good neighbors, better co-workers and contributing community members.

HOW DOES A STATE IMPLEMENT A LITERACY ACCOUNTABILITY SYSTEM?

Unique Approaches. Each state approaches the task differently, and adapts the system to its unique economic, social, and political conditions. Hawaii, with its strong tradition of democratic decisionmaking and consensus building, involved the public and private sectors in defining their vision of a literate Hawaii and determining the benchmarks to guide them there. New York, working from the top down and the bottom up, wove together the local perspective and the policy level perspective to develop their system's outcome statements and coordinate with ongoing initiatives in workforce preparation and adult education and training. Kentucky built its interagency working groups on the solid foundation of a coordinated Workforce Development Cabinet, moving quickly to a pilot effort that will base funding formulas and contracts on outcomes. The transformation in Tennessee is unfolding through the work of local task forces, and their insights are, in turn, helping state staff shape policies that are on track.

10 STEPS TO ESTABLISH A STATE LITERACY ACCOUNTABILITY SYSTEM

Step 1	Define Vision and Benchmarks
Step 2	Define Policy Outcomes
Step 3	Identify Performance Measures for Policy Outcomes
Step 4	Define Program Outcomes Related to Policy Outcomes
Step 5	Identify Program Performance Measures
Step 6	Identify Target Populations Related to Policy and Program Outcomes
Step 7	Compare Existing Service Delivery Patterns With Needs
Step 8	Collect Data and Communicate Results to Various Literacy Stakeholders
Step 9	Use Information to Improve Program Interventions
Step 10	Use Information to Adjust Resources and Policies

Common Values. While each of the four pilot states is pioneering its own approach, all are building on the same foundation to ensure that their systems are customer-centered, quality driven, and results-oriented. The chart above presents a synopsis of the key steps each state has used to shape and transform its own literacy system.

Voices of Experience. Following are brief overviews of how the four pilot states are implementing their own literacy accountability systems. In their own words, they describe what an accountability system has enabled them to do.

HAWAII

"NIFL has presented us with an excellent opportunity for stimulating systemic change . . . and creative thinking. We are becoming a learning organization. We now have clearly articulated outcomes."

Vision: In a literate Hawaii, people read, write, and communicate at levels that enable them to fulfill their aspirations in a secure, prosperous, diverse, and healthy society.

Collaboration From the Start. Developing a statewide literacy accountability system has brought Hawaii's tradition of collaboration among private and non-profit agencies and government to a new level. Rather than working together primarily to coordinate programs, the Hawaii Literacy Policy in Action Academy and its public and private interagency team have worked together from the beginning to create the blueprint for a statewide accountability system and a vision for a literate Hawaii. Outcomes accountability is a powerful tool to shape future policy and programs and establish commitments from both the public and private sectors right from the start.

Greater Awareness of Change. Stakeholders working together to define policy and program outcomes have developed an increased awareness of change and the change process. Translating a new state vision for literacy into actual changes in programs and policies requires change across the board—from governance to funders' responsibilities to the ability of programs to self-monitor and self-correct.

Becoming a Learning Organization. Becoming a learning organization requires not only a willingness to change but a commitment to continuous improvement. An accountability system provides multiple measures which paint a picture of how well things are going and which areas require additional attention. The information gathered from multiple measures guides both decision-makers and practitioners in the system.

Highlights to Date:

- Providing training to funders and providers about how to develop and respond to Request-for-Proposals that emphasize outcomes accountability.
- Designing planning techniques to enable program staff to self-monitor.
- Setting up process for information sharing across programs while protecting privacy.
- Analyzing agency data to profile the characteristics of participants, find relationships between outcomes and demographics, and discover trends that will shape future program design.
- Piloting literacy skills testing and reporting service utilizing the Workplace Literacy Test.
- Influencing funders to base funding decisions on outcomes.
- Working closely with all outcome projects in Hawaii to ensure alignment and synergy among the projects and ensure that Hawaii's outcomes are realized.

For more information please contact: Ermile Hargrove, Project Director, Tel: 808•586•7187, Fax: 808•586•7191, email: LIT_COUNCIL@lib.state.hi.us

KENTUCKY

Vision: Kentuckians will have the skills, knowledge, and opportunities to compete successfully in the state/global economy and to participate fully in family and community life.

"There is no doubt that PMRIS will take Kentucky's adult education system into the next century. It will allow us to work faster, more accurately, and as a team instead of separate entities across the state fighting battles alone."

First Steps Began at the Top. Kentucky began by organizing an Interagency Policy Team, led by the Department for Adult Education and Literacy, with high level membership—commissioner level and up. The commitment of the Governor and the State cabinet has been a key ingredient for success, and has helped shape Kentucky's efforts. Kentucky's original performance accountability working document was based on the Governor's initiatives on healthcare, education, and welfare reform.

Increased Efficiency and Effectiveness. A successful state accountability system establishes performance measures that focus on key outcomes for enhanced quality of life. It also requires the ability to collect and transmit data easily and accurately. To accommodate outcomes data collection and facilitate program improvement, Kentucky is centralizing and streamlining the data collection process, moving from bubble sheets to an on-line mainframe system. Centralized, technology-based record keeping will save time and effort across the state, and take Kentucky into the next century.

Highlights to Date:

- Determining diverse policy and program outcomes (quality and quantity) from family life skills through economic development.
- Determining measures for most outcomes.
- Collecting at least proxy data on majority of outcomes.
- Beginning to build systemic approach with agencies that administer adult basic and technical skills.
- Selecting approximately 30 adult education sites for pilot programs.
- Creating a funding formula based primarily on outcomes.
- Developing a contract for local providers based primarily on outcomes.
- Defining program monitoring and evaluation to assess attainment of outcomes.
- Generating active collaboration and participation at state level.

For more information please contact: Connie Bolin, PMRIS Project Director.
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NEW YORK

"The most helpful thing for New York has been that the funding has afforded us the opportunity to explore systems thinking, true interagency work, inclusion of local managers in the development process, and the opportunity to talk about the results we are trying to achieve."

Vision: New York's population will have the knowledge necessary to exercise the rights and responsibilities of citizenship, meet the workforce needs of a competitive global economy, meet their goals in the workplace, in training programs, in educational settings, and in personal life, and be economically self sufficient.

Sharing Leadership Across Agencies. New York has a strong history of coordination across agencies. The state accountability project has provided the first opportunity to operate with shared leadership across agencies, which has been a positive experience. By pulling together key agency people at the state and local levels, there is increased mutual investment. A non-agency tied project also allows all stakeholders to maintain focus and political will.

Providing the Foundation for an Integrated Management System. In New York State there is great interest and belief in the integrated human service delivery system, an understanding of what such a system could do for the state, and an informal system already operating on the local level, but there is no management system overall. A state accountability system lays the foundation to make possible such a management system by putting in place several essential elements—a centralized electronic data collection system, a set of terms and definitions common to all human services policies and programs, common goals, and a vehicle for planning, measuring and improving.

Highlights to Date:

- Coordinating component development with other State initiatives and projects.
- Devising plan to develop performance-based accountability system for adult literacy, basic education, and workforce development system.
- Coordinating and collaborating with the National Governors' Association Performance Measurement Project for Workforce Preparation.
- Expanding Policy Group to encompass stakeholders not originally considered.
- Conducting 16 focus interviews at eight sites across the state for input into system design.
- Developing working draft of Quantifiable Outcomes at both program and policy level through interagency policy level work group and local level interagency meetings and forums across the state.
- Providing electronic framework to track students and program information.

For more information please contact: Kate Toms, Project Director/Independent Broker, Tel: 518•442•5595, Fax: 518•442•3933.

TENNESSEE

Vision: Twenty-first century Tennessee will have a literate citizenry of lifelong learners prospering in multi-cultural harmony, respectful of the environment, actively participating in the community with healthy families and economic security for all.

"We have affirmed that the best decisions are made by people closest to the problem, and that they must play a significant role at every step of the way. We have also learned again that the support of people at the highest decision-making levels in key agencies is vital to success."

Working Together at State and Local Levels. Tennessee's experience is unique in that, from the beginning, the TRIMS (Tennessee Reporting and Information System) design has involved both a state-level policy team (representing key agencies, organizations and stakeholders) and four local task forces, bringing together local program managers and staff with other key players. Working at both levels simultaneously has been invaluable in bringing together different perspectives on performance management.

Building on Existing Collaborations. Tennessee state agencies involved in adult education and employment training already knew each other well and had a track record of collaboration. Developing a state accountability system built on and extended existing collaborative efforts. A well-developed technology infrastructure greatly enhanced the state's ability to create an integrated delivery system.

Students' Voices Heard Loud and Clear. Transformation of the Tennessee system has happened through a local, "bottom up" process. The Student Roundtable of the Tennessee Literacy Coalition, along with other student groups at local sites, contributed significantly to identifying outcomes from the student perspective. The State Policy Team used these local insights and the work of the local interagency task force members in drafting the State vision and policy and program outcomes. The result has been planned outcomes that are realistic and tailored to specific populations.

Highlights To Date

- Creating a working draft of program outcomes and performance measures.
- Involving program participants in describing outcomes of importance to them.
- Creating interagency agreements to share client data at the local level.
- Creating an electronic traveling record to track client progress and facilitate referrals.
- Identifying issues and barriers that prevent effective client service delivery.
- Designing a system that will address barriers.
- Creating interagency working groups at local and state levels.

For more information please contact: Juliet Merrifield, Project Director, or Mary Ziegler, Associate Director, Center for Literacy Studies, The University of Tennessee, Knoxville, Tel: 615•974•4109, Fax: 615•974•3857.

LOOKING BACK ON EXPERIENCE

Lessons Learned. A performance management, reporting, and improvement system is a powerful tool to change paradigms, change systems, revise policies and transform processes—all with the goal of wise investment of public funds to change lives for the better.

1. To achieve national and state goals, it is essential to craft a vision of where you want to go, and the goals to get you there. A statewide literacy system can be a catalyst to bring diverse stakeholders together and enable them to craft a common strategic vision. A happy byproduct of this process is buy-in from the contributing stakeholders.

2. Translating this vision into program change requires broad-based commitment at many levels. Moving from the vision of a better life for all to the nuts and bolts of how to do it is time consuming and challenging. Shifting the focus from inputs to outcomes doesn't happen overnight. Stakeholders at every level need to learn how to think differently about what they do. And, once the change in thinking begins, it impacts every aspect of design—defining outcomes and determining how to measure them, developing new data collection and management information systems, and improving program performance based on what is learned from the data.

We want to take down the walls between agencies that get in the way of providing the best services possible. To do that, it is important to get all the right players to the table.

—Tennessee

3. An effective statewide literacy system must be customer-focused, results-oriented, and quality-driven. State agencies seeking to build effective statewide literacy systems should begin with a focus on the customer—the adult learner—and use their goals and their strengths to help define the desired outcomes more accurately. A client-centered focus should also enable agencies to collect and share information and resources across traditional boundaries.

4. One hundred percent results will only be possible if other state level human resource and economic development initiatives are networked with the literacy system. Literacy systems do not exist in a vacuum, but are one piece of the puzzle to help states address multiple and overlapping needs. An individual who seeks to develop stronger literacy skills is likely to be unemployed or underemployed and in poverty. When we realize that these multiple systems are all serving the same client, it is clear that these systems must be networked together.

MOVING FORWARD: FROM PATCHWORK QUILT TO QUALITY SYSTEMS

An Unfinished Story. As the four pilot states continue to transform networks for delivery of adult education and training from a patchwork of loosely connected, often mismatched services to a coordinated, coherent and accessible system, their own processes of continuous improvement should yield rich lessons for all of us. As these states gain experience in thinking in new ways, and in defining outcome measures, they will be better able to help others make these transformations. As we all analyze progress, and work together to solve complex problems, we will improve our ability to help others through the common pitfalls.

Next Steps. As we see how these statewide literacy systems unfold, we will be better able to aggregate and measure the full impact of this initiative. Through these statewide literacy accountability systems, we will be better positioned to:

- Share experience and lessons learned with all states;
- Increase understanding of leverage points, incentives, and strategies to help states transform their systems;
- Increase the number of states implementing this approach and linking it to other statewide efforts in economic development, education reform, school-to-work transition, and community collaboration; and
- Ensure continuous improvement and sustainability of these efforts over the long term.

A Foundation for Success. The lessons we have learned thus far have provided a foundation for success. They have provided some touchstones to let us know we are on the right track. And, they have helped all of us see literacy in a new light, as a fundamental building block toward achieving national and state education and economic development goals. We pledge to continue providing national leadership, building a research agenda, and communicating our experience to all national, state, and local level stakeholders.

State leaders cannot afford to rely on guesswork to know if the programs they support are in fact achieving intended goals. The National Institute for Literacy has invested substantial resources in this initiative. Our purpose is to help states build adult literacy systems that make a strong and direct impact on chronic domestic problems and improve the quality of life for their citizens.

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